



State of Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources

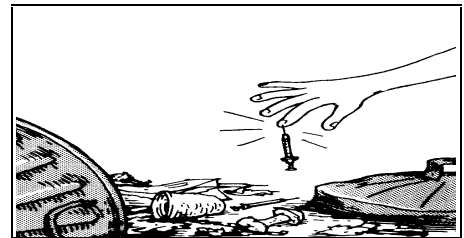
Medical Waste



DISPOSING OF HOUSEHOLD SHARPS

Used sharps pose health risk

As the number of home health care patients rises, sharps (needles, syringes and lancets) are increasingly being mixed in with household garbage and recyclables or flushed down the toilet. These sharps pose a health risk to garbage haulers and workers in recycling facilities who might be accidentally stuck by them. All "needlestick" injuries demand expensive testing, cause long-term emotional stress and increase the risk of exposure to infectious diseases such as Hepatitis B and HIV from contaminated needles.



To reduce such health risks, the state adopted rules in 1994 about how to package, treat and dispose of sharps, including household sharps. Sharps must be packaged safely and treated either by incineration at a licensed medical waste incinerator or by methods which render the sharps non-infectious and both broken and unable to be reused. Sharps must be treated before they are disposed of in a landfill. Other infectious waste generated at home may be bagged and put out with the regular trash.

Four steps to safe packaging

Follow these four steps for packaging your used, or discarded unused sharps:

1. **Clip the needle points with needle clippers, or recap or re-sheath discarded sharps to help prevent "needle sticks."** Recapping needles is discouraged in hospitals and other health care facilities because medical workers might stick themselves with contaminated needles, but individuals who administer their own medications are not at risk from their own needles.
2. **Place the sharps in rigid puncture-resistant containers with secure lids or caps.** Acceptable containers include commercially-available sharps containers or heavy plastic detergent or bleach bottles with screw caps. Unacceptable containers include coffee cans (their lids are too easily punctured), plastic milk jugs, plastic bags, pop cans or soda bottles. Note: DO NOT add bleach to the container. Bleach may not completely disinfect needles, and it could spill and injure you or waste handlers.

3. **Visibly label the sharps container** with the words "bio-hazard," "infectious waste" or "sharps," or with the bio-hazard emblem. It's also a good idea to label detergent bottles with the words "Do not recycle" so that they are not accidentally included with recyclables.
4. **When the container is full, sealed and labeled, store it out of reach of children and dispose of it properly.** Do not put the container out with the trash or with recyclables. Instead, take it to a registered "sharps collection station" or make other arrangements if such stations aren't available.



Disposal options

Ask your local doctor or clinic, diabetic support group, pharmacy, hospital, public health department, solid waste or streets department or environmental services department about local options. Some of them may be registered sharps collection stations. You may also call your local DNR office (ask for the waste management specialist) or the American Diabetes Association (1-888-342-2383) for locations of registered sharps collection stations. Registered sharps collection stations may only charge fees to recover costs, such as costs for the container, transportation and treatment. Some offer the service for free.

If there are no local sharps collection programs, you may take sharps directly to a licensed infectious waste treatment facility or contract with a licensed infectious waste hauler to transport them for you. (People transporting more than 50 pounds per month must get a license from the DNR). Ask your doctor where she or he sends sharps, or look in the yellow pages under "waste disposal" or "medical waste."

Another option provided by some disposal companies is a mail-in sharps disposal program. The company provides containers and packaging which meet U.S. Postal regulations.

Write your local disposal options here:

Acknowledgments

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources gratefully acknowledges the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency for permission to use information from their "Disposal of Household Sharps" brochure and the Washington State Department of Ecology for permission to use graphics from their "Get the Point" brochure.

DISCLAIMER: This fact sheet is not intended as a substitute for the regulations and statutes that apply. Rather, it is a brief summary of the topic. Please consult Wisconsin's regulations and statutes for more information. PUBL-WA804-00...October 9, 2000

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